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THE AGE OF QUICKENED CONSCIENCE

PRESIDENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

A MACCALAUREATE ADDRESS DELIVERED JUNE 14, 1908

THE ARTHUR MALLS



THE AGE OF Quickened conscience

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A BACCALAUREATE ADDRESS DELIVERED JUNE 14, 1908

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The Age of Quickened Conscience

BACCALAUREATE DISCOURSE

BY PRESIDENT ANGELL, DELIVERED JUNE 14

If any proof is needed to show that men are made with an instinct for associated life, not for individual isolation, it is furnished by the frequent spectacle of the rapid spread through a whole region or a whole people of some taste or passion. It may be a fancy for some game, as croquet or tennis or base ball, and in the space of a few months a whole nation is devoting all its leisure hours to it; or to rise to higher objects the passion for revolution in a few months seizes on the citizens of France and overturns the throne which has stood unshaken for centuries. So the cry of Peter, the Crusader, suddenly startles all western Europe and shakes the continent beneath the tread of armies, inflamed with the unquenchable passion to deliver the holy sepulchre from the hand of the Saracen. It is not surprising therefore that the fire of religious zeal should at times as in 1857, when once kindled, spread even through the market places and that the halls of the money changers should become the scene of prayer and of penitent confession. It is not strange that as in our own time, at least in the middle west, the passion for popular education should be spreading everywhere and overflowing school and college and university with eager youth longing to train themselves in the most efficient manner for business or professions.

Since this imitative spirit, the social instinct, the sympathetic impulse, have so led mankind to act together in masses towards some common end, we need not regard it as astonishing that to our great delight we are witnessing a new awakening of conscience all over the nation. How or why it appeared at exactly this time it may not be easy to say. And for the purpose of this discussion it may not be important to decide. But this awakening manifests itself in a great variety of ways.

Its reaction in our own country against intemperance in drinking has been so sudden and has spread over so wide a territory and among communities where it was unlooked for that the movement has seemed almost incredible. Even in Germany and France and England science is beginning to warn the public that reform in drinking habits is essential to the preservation of national vigor, and that a higher morality is essential to the protection of the public health.

But especially has indignation been excited at malfeasance in the management of great corporations, in the discharge of the duties of public office, in the betrayal of fiduciary trusts. No doubt in the excited state of the public mind reckless charges have been made against innocent corporations and individuals, and have been widely and unjustly circulated before the accused have had opportunity to defend or explain their acts. But even those who condemn such unjust attacks or who deem extravagant the language used in assailing some who are justly criticised confess that there are many public evils rightly and severely complained of.

So the halls of legislation, both state and federal, have been for months resounding with discussions of the most effective legislation to prevent misdeeds of the kind referred to. The courts have been busy trying persons accused of them, and the President with his accustomed vigor of utterance has been appealing to Congress and to the people in stimulation

of a sound public sentiment in the maintainance of honesty.

I need not say to you who have been here for the two or three years that among students there has been a wholesome revolt against certain abuses in what we call college politics, and that this has done not a little to purify the atmosphere of college life.

If we look beyond our own neighborhood and even beyond our own country we find that throughout the civilized world there is a deep feeling that a readjustment is needed in the relations of the employer and employed, that there is a dangerous chasm between labor and capital, that somehow in many cases the workingman is not receiving his shares of the products which his industry is instrumental in creating. However men may differ in their proposed solution of the problem presented by this difficulty, yet the consciences of many capitalists are prompting them to study the problem with as much honesty and sincerity as the poorest laborer brings to it. Never was there a time when the Christain thinkers of the world were so earnestly seeking what remedy the gospels of Christ have for the ailments of the social and economic organization of mankind.

Now this new condition of things, this widespread quickening of conscience is a great, palpable fact which deeply concerns all of you, who are just going out into active life. You cannot, if you would, utterly disregard it.

First, it is a grave warning not to try for success by failing to reckon with this state of public conscience. The legislator wno gives himself to the wretched work of drafting laws so that they may be easily evaded, the attorney who makes a special business of helping crafty men evade wholesome laws, the physician who by quackery and pretense seeks opportunities to trifle with human life or to conceal crime, the engineer who draws papers so as to further plans of fraudulent contractors, the

teacher who organizes and conducts his school so as to make sure of drawing inordinate compensation from wealthy parents rather than impart solid instruction to his pupils, the captains of industry who coin their gains out of the life-blood of helpless and impoverished operatives, these and all others of kindred spirit, whatever their vocation, will hereafter face a public more vigilant in exposing and more merciless in punishing their sins than the generation that has just passed from the stage.

I will not dwell on the lesson of warning for I trust you do not need it. The American students as a rule leave their studies with high ideals of character and conduct. But it is well for you to have a clear preception of the environment in which you will find yourselves, I prefer, however, to point this out to you rather as an appeal than as a personal warning. I mean by this that you should regard this awakening of the public conscience, which we so clearly recognize, as an appeal to you to throw yourselves into your work with the purpose to do all in your power to strengthen this determination of the people to maintain public virtue.

I count you as peculiarly fortunate in going into active life in so propitious circumstances. I heartily congratulate you on it. I recall no time in the past half century when one going from college into professional, official or business life could find it so easy and so helpful to himself to set his moral standards high and hold to them. "The people at large are everywhere in the mood to welcome men with such standards, to employ them, to give them such positions of trust and responsibility as educated men have a right to aspire to. They are not looking for cunning tricksters, but for earnest, sensible, well equipped men, who can stand "four-square" to all the winds of temptation and honorably serve their day and generation. They wish unselfish, ungrasping men in great industries, who in the spirit of their Lord and Master shall remember the brotherhood of

man. It is for you to say whether you will prove yourselves worthy of the times upon which you have fallen. As you launch your craft this week for the long voyage before you, favoring gales and propitious currents are waiting to help you to a happy haven.

We are this week to lay the corner stone of the Memorial Building which shall keep green the memory of the brave and patriotic young men who, standing where you stand to-day, willingly sacrificed all their prospects in life and poured out their blood on southern fields that you and I might dwell here in peace and prosperity to-day. Do you not sometimes envy them the chance which came to them to make so glorious a record and to render the University and the country forever their debtor? That peculiar fortune can never be yours. But a fortune hardly less glorious is open to you all. You have the chance in this age to be what the Apostle calls "a crown of rejoicing" to the University by lives so pure and noble that she will be proud to enroll your names on the tablets of her memory, and some of you by lives so effective and conspicuous that she will wish to place your names on the tablets of bronze by the side of the young heroes of our wars.

The colleges and universities of the country are about to be subjected to a severe test. The public seems convinced that they are furnishing the intellectual training to fit their graduates for useful service in every vocation. Never were these graduates more in demand, whereas a few years ago many questioned whether a college training afforded the best preparation for certain pursuits, especially for business and for engineering. Now there seems to be a pretty general consensus of opinion even among those who emphasize what they are pleased to call a practical education that the college or the university or the technical school furnishes the best mental outfit for life in most vocations.

But now it is to be demonstrated whether with the intellectual outfit our graduates carry away from the

